

THE IMPACT OF DIVERSITY IN REPORTING ON THE EDITORIAL  
INDEPENDENCE OF SMALL-SCALE REGIONAL COMMUNITY  
NEWSPAPERS BASED IN THE EASTERN CAPE.

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**DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this Assignment is my original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.



**ABSTRACT:**

Journalism in South Africa has to be looked at in its historical context. South Africa was a country characterised by disparities. The same can be said about the media in this country. Mainstream media concentrated on the privileged few and projected their views. On the other hand small regional community media aimed at marginalized communities provided a “voice for the voiceless.” These small newspapers focused on the disadvantaged, rural and semi-literate communities. As a result of the history of this country, mainstream media neglected the marginalized communities.

A need arose for redressing that imbalance and diversifying reporting. Small community newspapers were the means to achieve that. Unfortunately these newspapers fail to attract advertisers for various reasons. A large percentage of the marginalized communities were unemployed and very few could afford to buy newspapers. One copy of a newspaper was shared by between eight (8) and ten (10) people and that meant low circulation figures. The level of literacy was low and those who were literate, had to read to those who could not. The advertising industry was and is still biased and prejudiced against community media.

Most small community newspapers died because of these economic factors. This brings about a need for funding of these newspapers. Are funders prepared to pump money without interfering with editorial independence of newspapers? This Assignment sets out to analyse the conflict between the necessity for diversity in reporting (accommodating the previously neglected) and journalistic independence (related to the need for funding). For the purposes of this Assignment, the focus will be on small regional community newspapers in the Eastern Cape, the Border/Kei- area in particular. The purpose of this Assignment is firstly to ascertain whether moves to diversify media/reporting are taking place – an ethical concern. Secondly to establish whether those who fund these newspapers interfere with their content.

Various methods of research are used to establish the purpose of the Assignment. Research methodology in use reveals that attempts to diversify the media by focusing on marginalized communities becomes futile. The reason being that those who provide funding directly or indirectly impose their ideas on the newspapers. Small community newspaper then project the ideas of the privileged people as result of the pressure from funding. It can be concluded that a solution that regards diversity in reporting and

editorial independence as ethical principles is necessary (deontological model). That same solution would have to provide consequences that benefit the greatest number of people (utilitarian approach). Such a solution would in essence ensure the survival and sustainability of small regional newspapers and their editorial independence.



**ABSTRAK:**

Joernalistiek in Suid-Afrika moet binne die historiese konteks beskou word. Die land was gekenmerk deur ongelykhede. Dieselfde norm geld vir die media. Die hoofstroom media wat op die kleiner, bevoorregte groep gekonsentreer het, het uiteraard slegs hul siening geprojekteer. Andersyds is die kantlyn “stom” gemeenskappe tog voorsien van ‘n stem deur die klein, gemeenskapsgerigte media. Dié klein koerante het gefokus op semi-geletterde, minder bevoorregte inwoners van die landelike gebiede. Dit was juis hierdie kantlyn gemeenskappe wat om historiese redes verwaarloos was. Die behoefte het dus ontstaan vir die regstelling van die wanbalans en ‘n diversifisering van verslaggewing. Kleiner gemeenskapskoerante sou ideaal geskik wees om hierdie doel te bereik. Ongelukkig misluk hulle om verskeie redes om adverteerders te lok. Die hoë werkloosheidssyfer en gepaardgaande armoede in hierdie kantlyngemeenskappe het koerante onbekostigbaar gemaak vir die meerderheid. Een kopie is deur 8-10 mense gedeel. Dit het op sy beurt die sirkulasiesyfer laat daal. Dié wat kon lees, moes voorlees aan die meerderheid ongeletterdes.

Die advertensiewese was en is steeds bevoordeeld teen die klein gemeenskapsmedia. Gevolglik kon hierdie projekte in die verlede om verskeie ekonomiese redes nie oorleef nie. Dit op sy beurt plaas die behoefte vir befondsing onder die soeklig. Die vraag ontstaan nou of sodanige befonders die redaksionele onafhanklikheid van hierdie media sal respekteer? Hierdie tesis poog om ‘n analise te maak van die konflik wat ontstaan wanneer aan die een kant gepoog word om alle kantlyn groepe te betrek deur diversifisering en aan die ander kant die befondsing wat bekom moet word sonder om joernalistieke onafhanklikheid prys te gee. Vir die doel van hierdie tesis sal die fokus wees op die klein gemeenskapskoerante in die Oos-Kaap, meer spesifiek die Grens/Kei-gebied.

Die primêre doel van die tesis is, eerstens om vas te stel of daar enige diversifisering plaasvind in die joernalistieke/media area – dit is ‘n etiese kwessie. In die tweede plek moet vasgestel word of die befonders inmeng in die inhoud van die ontvanger-koerante. Verskeie vorms van navorsing word gebruik om bogenoemde doelwite te bereik. Navorsingsmetodiek het bewys dat huidige pogings om te diversifiseer sodat kantlyngemeenskappe betrek kan word, misluk. Die rede hiervoor is dat die befonders – direk of indirek – hul idees, wat uiteraard die bevoorregte gemeenskap weerspieël, afdwing.

Die slotsom is dat enige oplossing gebaseer moet wees op beginsels/reëls wat die meerderheid sal bevoordeel. So 'n oplossing sal aanpasbaar moet wees by omstandighede. Dit moet egter ten alle tye die oorlewing en volhoubaarheid van die klein gemeenskapskoerante en hul redaksionele onafhanklikheid, waarborg.



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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1 MINI-ASSIGNMENT TITLE	9
1.2 BACKGROUND AND PROFILES	10
1.3 DATA COLLECTION PLAN	14
1.4 DEFINITION OF TERMS	15
1.5 DELIMITING FACTORS	16
 <b>CHAPTER TWO</b>	 <b>18</b>
2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW	18
 <b>CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>	 <b>30</b>
3.1 INTERVIEWS	30
3.2 QUESTIONNAIRE	34
3.3 ORAL HISTORY	40
 <b>CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS &amp; INTERPRETATION OF DATA</b>	 <b>42</b>
 <b>CHAPTER FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION</b>	 <b>48</b>
 <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	 <b>52</b>



## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 MINI-ASSIGNMENT TITLE**

#### **TITLE:**

The impact of diversity in reporting on the editorial independence of small-scale regional community newspapers based in the Eastern Cape.

#### **SUB TITLE:**

The newspapers include *Isigidimi*, *Inkwenkwezi*, *Imvo Zabantsundu* and *Evening Post*.

#### **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:**

To investigate how the necessity for diversity in reporting results in a conflict with editorial/journalistic independence.

#### **RATIONALE/MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY**

The purpose of this Assignment is to investigate how the necessity for diversity in reporting results in a conflict with editorial/journalistic independence, two ethical principles. Over the past two decades, small scale community newspapers in the Border/Kei area have closed down or been absorbed by conglomerates like Independent Newspapers Group, Times Media Limited (now Johnnic) and Perskor. One leading characteristic of these small community newspapers is their focus on the marginalized communities and their views – a function mainstream media fail to perform. Their disappearance from the scene means small disadvantaged communities are neglected. The reason for this state of affairs can be blamed on the history of South Africa. For decades South Africa was a country characterized by disparities.

The prejudice of advertisers against small community newspapers has also contributed to their closure. This necessitates that funding be provided for the survival of these newspapers. Funding poses a threat to another ethical principle namely journalistic independence.

This Assignment sets out to investigate why these two ethical principles (journalistic independence and diversity in reporting) are at odds.



## 1.2 **BACKGROUND**

The former chairman of the American Federal Communications Commission, Reed Hundt, once said, "It is generally understood that the rise of media monopolies led to a shift in editorial content, city by city, to a far less confrontational, far less controversial, far less skeptical and challenging press". Hundt said this at a panel, "Speaking With One Voice? Cross-Ownership of the Press" (McNair: 1999:51).

What can be deduced from the above quotation is that a change in media ownership and control directly or indirectly impacts on what is produced by a newspaper whether positively or negatively. Hence it is worth finding out or investigating how funding affects small-scale newspapers based in the Eastern Cape such as *Isigidimi*, *Imvo Zabantsundu*, *Inkwenkwezi* and *Evening Post*.

A common factor amongst these identified newspapers is that they were established with a purpose of furthering the aspirations of the communities in which they exist. The profit motive came as a secondary purpose. The said communities are small, rural and semi-rural black communities of the Eastern Cape. A large percentage of this population is illiterate. Those who can read are comfortable in reading what is written in their first language, IsiXhosa.

Tomaselli and Louw (1991:180) identify three stages in the development of the black press in South Africa, namely the missionary era, elitist era (independent) and white capital era. What characterised the independent era according to them was that ownership and control of the black press was in the hands of blacks. Although short-lived, this era saw blacks not only writing their aspirations but also managing these newspapers.

Tomaselli and Louw (1991:181) further state that during the white capital era, capital was invested in the black press because its profit potential was identified. They say those who invested the capital were not necessarily interested in the newspapers themselves.



According to them (Tomaselli and Louw: 1991:182), newspapers aimed at the black readership during the independent era, did not live long. The reason for this being lack of funding (financial resources limited) and organisational problems. As a result by 1936 key representatives of the independent era such as *Imvo Zabantsundu*, *Ilanga*, *Ikhwezi* and *Mochochonono* had been gobbled up by big media houses while others such as *Abantu-Batho* had collapsed. During this time, literacy amongst blacks had increased from 9.89 % to 12.4 %.

Like Hundt, Louis Day (1991:180) concurs that there is evidence to the fact that public ownership alters the basic value system of a news organisation. On the positive side media concentration could result in a better product because of the pooling of economic resources. On a number of occasions chain ownership has allowed many newspapers that might otherwise have died, a chance to survive. On the other hand the interference by parent companies with editorial decisions of news operations is a known factor.

According to Day (1991:180) the most serious threat to media institutional independence is the trend towards ownership by outside corporations that have no commitment to the journalistic imperative and spirit. From the above discussion it becomes evident that funding whether it comes from ownership, advertising or outside source infringes on the editorial independence of small newspapers. This violates an ethical principle of editorial independence. For the newspapers in question (small community) whose focus is to redress the imbalance (diversity), there emerges an ethical quandary. This is because of the clash between two ethical principles of journalistic independence and the need for diversity. There is a need to diversify a media that has been one-sided for a long period. In order to achieve that objective, funding becomes necessary, but it comes with infringement of the editorial independence. Diversity in reporting is supposed to bring about diverse views, but that objective is not achieved because of editorial interference. Instead editorial interference imposes the views of the powerful, mighty elite.

McNair (1999:53) captures this so well when he states, "rather obviously, those who own and control the capitalist mass media are most likely to be men whose ideological dispositions run from soundly conservative to utterly reactionary and



in many instances, most notably in the case of newspapers, the impact of their views is immediate and direct. In the straight forward sense that newspaper proprietors have often not only owned their newspapers but closely controlled their editorial and political lines as well.”

This becomes relevant to those small community newspapers that get swallowed up by conglomerates. They no longer serve their objective but are an extension of the views of their parent companies.

One could assume that in the spirit of journalistic independence, the editor should publish the story undeterred by the threat of economic reprisal. But if the loss of revenue is likely to lead to the closure of the newspaper, the newspaper may then be unable to provide quality service to the public in the form of news coverage. Big, well-established newspapers may have the financial security to withstand such pressures, but small community/family-owned newspapers such as *Isigidimi*, *Iso Lomzi* and *Imvo Zabantsundu* do not.

### **PROFILE: ISIGIDIMI**

*Isigidimi* initially known as *Isigidimi samaXhosa* (The Xhosa Messenger) - was founded in 1876 under the editorship of John Tengo Jabavu. It is credited as the first African newspaper to be edited by blacks in Southern Africa. *Isigidimi* as the name suggests was used to express views on what was considered to be the black man's point of view. What started as John Tengo Jabavu's dream of a community newspaper based in the King Williams Town (Eastern Cape) area, closed down in the late 1800s as a result of financial and organisational problems. Seeing the need of a community newspaper aimed at a black readership in the Border and Transkei area, veteran journalist and editor Mr Victor Tonjeni restarted *Isigidimi* in 1989.

With three (3) reporters, a layout artist (Tonjeni's wife) and limited resources Jabavu's light was reignited. *Isigidimi* had its head office in Umtata, a sub-office in Butterworth and a readership of 50 000. It covered mainly local news in the Border and Transkei area and was 80% in IsiXhosa and 20% in English. *Isigidimi* survived mainly on local advertising until its closure in 1991. Its sales rocketed especially in December because it published Matric results for rural



Transkei schools. *Isigidimi* came out fortnightly and was a tabloid size newspaper. Efforts to revive *Isigidimi* again in 1999 by another veteran journalist Lungisani Makongolo proved futile. The newspaper was in circulation for a year and a half and then closed down in 2001. Makongolo although operating the newspaper from King Williams Town, was met with the same problems Tonjeni had encountered earlier in Umtata (Tomaselli et al: 1987:46).

### **PROFILE: IMVO ZABANTSUNDU**

According to Switzer and Adhikari (1999:75) *Imvo Zabantsundu* (African Opinion) was also founded by John Tengo Jabavu in November 1884. It was the first newspaper to progress from being written for and by blacks, to being under the ownership and control of blacks. It is said that *Imvo Zabantsundu* developed into the most influential and effective means of expression of black opinion in the Cape. At some stage *Imvo* experienced financial difficulties and resentment from *Isigidimi* because it was perceived as competition. *Imvo Zabantsundu* intervened on a practical level in many issues of the day such as the imprisonment of several chiefs on Robben Island. In 1936 *Imvo Zabantsundu* together with other representatives of Black aspirations such as the *Ilanga*, *Ikhwezi* & *Mochochono* were swallowed up by the then Argus Group. As a result of this shift of ownership, the newspaper ceased to be a means of expression of black opinion even though it had a black editor. *Imvo Zabantsundu* was a tabloid newspaper that came out weekly. In its later years of existence, Perskor acquired majority shares in *Imvo Zabantsundu*. The newspaper closed down in 1998.

### **PROFILE: INKWENKWEZI**

*Inkwenkwezi*- This tabloid weekly newspaper was started in 1980 and owned by the Transkei Associated Newspapers Limited. Its board of directors comprised of the following people:

DDP Ndamase, HHN Bubu, VV Tonjeni (Managing Director), DS Koyana and GRR Fani.

The newspaper covered quite extensively news of the then Transkei homeland, which had just obtained its independence. About 80% of its owners were cabinet



ministers in KD Matanzima's Transkei government. Funding for this paper came from advertising and from its owners (Transkei cabinet ministers). Everything went well for the paper until owners started to interfere with the editorial content. Matanzima wanted the newspaper to be the mouthpiece of his government. The editor resisted this. The friction intensified over time until it led to the closure of the newspaper in 1984 when Transkei's Prime Minister K.D. Matanzima fired all the staff. Before its closure the newspaper boasted a readership of between 25 000 and 30 000. The paper's head office was in Umtata, which was also the capital town of the homeland of Transkei. (Switzer and Adhikari: 1999:75)

### **PROFILE: EVENING POST**

Tomaselli et al (1987:52) state that this Port Elizabeth based evening daily was established in 1950 under the editorship of John Sutherland. It was aimed at the African and Coloured readership of Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage townships. The *Evening Post* was owned by Times Media Eastern Cape (TMEC) and closed down in November 2000 as a result of a decline in revenue. Its last editor Ms Lakela Kaunda started a programme in 1998 of repositioning the paper to be a watchdog as well as an instrument of social development.

The *Evening Post* was published in English and covered a number of issues affecting the majority of people where it was circulated. It was a tabloid size paper with a circulation of 23 000.

## **1.3 DATA COLLECTION PLAN**

Structured interviews are to be conducted with the following categories of people at *Isigidimi*, *Imvo Zabantsundu*, *Inkwenkwezi* and the *Evening Post*.

- ❖ Senior management
- ❖ General Staff (reporters, photographers & layout artist)
- ❖ Directors (Board)
- ❖ Staff Union



The purpose of the interviews is to ascertain how ownership and funding affected the running of the above-mentioned newspapers as well as how it affected the end product namely (news).

Written records from the library and newspaper archives will be used. Oral history from retired, experienced journalists will also be utilized.

Also data obtained from each newspaper's financial statements, annual report and minutes of meetings will provide much needed information.

Already available theoretical literature from sources on funding and ownership from libraries will be used.

A combination of different instruments of research such as surveys and interviews will be used due to the complexity of topic.

#### 1.4 **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

“PAPER” – in this context paper refers to any newspaper/publication whether tabloid or broadsheet size that comes out either daily, weekly or monthly.

“CONGLOMERATE” – refers to a vast media house or corporation owning a series of publications formed by the merging of separate and diverse media firms. Examples would be ING, TML, NAIL.

“FAMILY-OWNED NEWSPAPER” – publication which has two or more members of a family owning it.

“EP” – in this context refers to the Evening Post newspaper.

“DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITY” – refers to the majority of the people of South Africa who were deprived of all opportunities because of the history of this country but were liberated in 1994.

“SMALL-SCALE REGIONAL COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER” – refers to a newspaper confined in terms of circulation to a particular region and serves the needs of that community.

“FUNDING” – in this case means provision of income or revenue for a publication either through advertising or ownership.

“TML” – Times Media Limited.

“NAIL” – New Africa Investment Limited.

“ING” – Independent Newspapers Group.

Q: In this context stands for question posed during an interview

A: In this Assignment A stands for an answer received from an interviewee.

“TMEC” - Times Media Eastern Cape

“TONJENI” – refers to Mr Victor Tonjeni, Managing Editor of both *Isigidimi* and *Inkwenkwezi*.

“MAKONGOLO” – refers to Mr Lungisani Makongolo, another editor of *Isigidimi*.

“MDDA” - Media Development and Diversity Agency

“GCIS” - Government Communication and Information Service

## 1.5 **DELIMITING FACTORS**

Accessing information from newspaper’s financial statements, annual reports and minutes of meetings proved difficult. Those in possession of such documents maintain they contain confidential information and therefore cannot be made available for scrutiny or research purposes.

Also getting information from board directors of newspapers did not materialize because they were no longer serving on those boards. Therefore they were reluctant to give information because of the shift in ownership.

Some feared the research was aimed at pinpointing the embezzlement of funds. In a sense, the information they had was considered privileged.



Membership of Staff Unions in the media sector changes from time to time. So there was no staff union that was prepared to give information on the situation at the stated newspapers. Also because most staff were on a freelance basis, they did not belong to unions.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW**

1. Louis A. Day-**Ethics in Media Communications: Cases and Controversies**. According to Day (1999:180) in the chapter on "*Economic pressures and social responsibility*," there is evidence that public ownership alters the basic value system of a news organization. Day also argues that as a result of media concentration, a better product can be attained, because of the pooling of economic resources. Furthermore, according to Day (1991:181), in most cases parent companies do not intrude into the editorial decisions of their news operations. This is a questionable statement and forms the basis of the topic being researched. Day also contradicts himself stating that, "perhaps the most serious threat to media institutional independence is the trend towards ownership by outside corporations that have no commitment to the journalistic imperative and spirit". The topic being researched revolves around ethical issues. Day (1991:46) delves deep into ethical approaches in the chapter on "Ethics and moral reasoning." His discussion of ethical models forms the basis on which the conclusion arrived at in the topic is made.
2. **Breaking Story-SA Press** by Gordon S. Jackson gives a detailed account in chapter 4-(The realities of the marketplace) of what the editors did to save editorial independence amidst changes in ownership of the newspapers in South Africa in the 1980s.
3. John C Merrill – **The Dialectic in Journalism**. Merrill (1989:72) provides a detailed distinction between absolutism and relativism as ethical models one can follow in decision-making. Merrill (1989:243) states, "the journalist who is committed to freedom is a free journalist. A journalist, who is committed to ethics, is an ethical journalist. A journalist who is committed to ethics and freedom is a rational, existential journalist. This journalist is free because there is a will to be free, and is ethical because there is a will to be ethical. Journalism needs



ethical direction to guide its freedom. Journalists need to recognize that they must both be free and ethical.”

4. The Cape Times newspaper dated 14 May 2001-Article by Mathatha Tsedu as the deputy editor of the Star and President of the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF). Article titled **Ownership is Power.** Here Tsedu writes about transformation in the S.A Press not only in ownership but composition of the editorial staff.
5. South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) **Report into Racism in the Media.** A variety of witnesses in the form of editors from newspapers, radio and television stations placed before the Commission provide different sets of information. Before the commission, views from the metropolitan centre newspapers were heard but also from smaller town newspapers like the Evening Post. The Port Elizabeth-based Evening Post's account was heard through its editor Ms Lakela Kaunda. This account is important because it voices the role of the editors irrespective of who owns a newspaper. Ms Kaunda gave evidence as a black woman editor of a newspaper owned by a conglomerate, Times Media Limited. According to her, newspapers “shape public opinion” and hence it is crucial that as many voices be heard through the pages of a paper. Evening Post was also aimed at a black readership. For Ms Kaunda black people from disadvantaged communities do not want to be spoken about. They want to speak for themselves. She stated that under her leadership, the Evening Post was repositioned to be the paper for changing times. In the report (SAHRC) she calls for newspapers to “develop the kind of patriotism which one finds in the western media, without losing their independence.”
6. Javnost –The Public, Vol.6, Number 2, 1999 The Journal has a chapter on media ownership and control in East-Central Europe. There is an article written by Slavko Splichal entitled, **Ownership, Regulation and Socialisation: Rethinking The Principles of Democratic Media.** According to Splichal mass media help determine and demonstrate the limits of legitimate public discussion in society. Information subsidy



limits access to information and inhibits free (political) expression by forcing the media to conform to particularistic political or commercial interests and beliefs. There are lessons to be learnt from this East European experience because they have undergone the process of media democratization (diversity) before South Africa. Situations may not necessarily be the same but there are similarities. Their model will have to be adapted to suit the South African environment. Their blunders with regards to funding and editorial independence should be a learning curve for the South African situation. Because mass media have extremely important functions for democratic societies, they require public regulation to eventually help transform them into public service media. It is argued that media democratisation requires specific forms of regulation beyond market regulation and private subsidies in order to limit the power and control in the hands of commercial and political actors and to thwart the development of powerful coalitions.

7. Javnost-The Public, Vol 6 (1999), No 2. In this journal an article written by Beverly James-**Ownership and Control of the Hungarian Press**, analyses the economic structure of the Hungarian press. It also focuses on how the Hungarian press' editorial content is controlled. The article also looks at ownership and control of regional and weekly press. Beverly James states that while control of editorial content is mainly a function of ownership and market forces, journalists at some publications have secured a degree of independence.
8. Javnost-The Public, Vol 6 (1999) No 2. Agnes Gulyas' article – **Structural changes and organisations in the Print Media market of Post Communist East Central Europe**, asserts that the transformation of the media in East Central Europe during the post-communist period is featured by different economic, social and cultural changes. Gulyas argues that foreign media ownership is part of general internationalisation of post-communist media in East Central Europe, which process has both positive and negative effects.



9. **SA needs a diversity of media ownership** by Tokyo Sexwale, Gauteng ANC chairperson in *Mayibuye*, opinion piece, Vol6, No6-October 1995. Sexwale says Media in South Africa should be owned by people from all sectors of the “rainbow nation”. He says the fact that a foreign investor is the majority shareholder in a South African media institution (Independent Newspapers) is cause for concern. “ We need limitations on the degree of foreign ownership of media institutions. We need a truly South African media to tell the South African story and South African ownership and control is the best way to make sure this happens. Because of the influence of the media in shaping opinions, we must guard against the concentration of ownership in the hands of a small group people whether they be foreigners or South Africans”, said Tokyo Sexwale. Sexwale also said it is precisely because the new South Africa needs a diversity of ideas that a diversity of ownership is needed. According to him that principle extends both to the number of institutions which are able to publish and broadcast and to the ownership structure of those individual institutions.
10. CBC News Online – August 2001. Jennifer Chen and Gary Graves in a report on **Media Ownership in Canada** say there are growing concerns that mega-media corporations have too much power over what appears on television, radio and in the newspaper. They state that a fistful of companies own large chunks of the media, leaving smaller companies scrambling for footholds. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) oversees ownership of the media in Canada and imposes regulations meant to ensure fair competition and diversity of ownership.
11. The Media Development and Diversity Agency-MDDA-**Report on Media in South Africa**. According to this report during the past few years, there have been significant changes in ownership, control and staffing of the mainstream media industry albeit within definite limits. The industry experienced unbundling, black empowerment and foreign acquisitions, public broadcaster sales and new entrants in print, radio and television. Some media board’s racial and gender profiles have changed.



Many journalists and editors from the alternative press occupy leading positions in the mainstream media.

The report asserts that nevertheless, despite these changes, there is still considerable concentration of ownership and control. The media diet is still too narrowly focused for a country as diverse as South Africa. While those with means can now access a wider variety of media, the majority, particularly living outside the metropolitan areas, has experienced little change. The legacy of apartheid remains and significant schools of thought including that of the democratic movement, remain marginalized.

According to the report while changes in ownership management and the newsroom have had some impact on the editorial content of newspapers and radio stations, in many cases little has changed. Black and trade union investors have been cautious about broadening or altering the market orientation of profit-making ventures.

12. Keyan Tomaselli, Ruth Tomaselli and Johan Muller: Narrating the crisis. Provide the historical overview of the press with its political underpinnings.
13. Dialogus Vol. 2 No.2 (1995) Media policy on ownership authored by Lucas Oosthuizen of the University of South Africa. In the article Oosthuizen says the concentration of press ownership in South Africa rates amongst the highest in the world. He further argues that concern about concentration of media ownership is quite common in democracies. The main objection is that it diminishes the diversity of competing voices that must provide the public with a multiplicity of information and opinions on which to base its decisions. Under these conditions especially newspapers catering for smaller market segments also find it very difficult to enter the market. Oosthuizen says democratic countries have exercised mainly two policy options to curtail media concentration, namely the introduction of antimonopoly legislation and the subsidisation of smaller newspapers.



14. GCIS – **Draft Paper on Media Development and Diversity**. The Communication Task Team (Comtask) report of 1996 proposed the setting up of a Media Development and Diversity Agency. Cabinet adopted the proposal. It was proposed that the MDDA be an independent, statutory body funded by government, donors and the media industry. According to the paper, the South African experience has shown that market forces, changes in ownership and opportunities for licences on their own cannot fully achieve transformation in the media industry. Hence the need for an agency like the MDDA. Also international experience shows support schemes to promote media development and diversity are not new. They have been implemented in Europe since the 1950s on the basis of market forces alone but would not achieve sufficient diversity.  
Indeed, the evidence is that the market on its own tends towards increased concentration, which can inhibit freedom of expression and diversity of views.
15. Ecquid Novi Journal - 1996 Vol 17 No 2. Rams Mabote's article – **Changes in print media ownership in South Africa**. In this article Mabote states that all the changes and acquisition in South African media have not been without controversies. This is very important in this research topic because changes in ownership have been thought to bring about positive outcomes only. Mabote states that chief among the problems faced by new owners or owners-to-be, is the issue of editorial independence. When everyone thought that problem would be faced by those buying into white titles, it was less intense at the *Sowetan* when Motlana took over in 1995. At a series of staff meetings, staffers had complained about the way in which Motlana had intervened on editorial matters. According to Mabote it was and is probably still common belief within *Sowetan* that Motlana gets directives from the African National Congress (ANC), particularly from former President Nelson Mandela about the editorial content of the *Sowetan*.



16. *Daily Mail & Guardian Newspaper* – 14 May 1999 – Article by Howard Barrell headlined **Ramaphosa enters the editorial fray**. In this article Barrell writes that media ownership and editorial independence have come to the fore again as African National Congress (ANC) – aligned Johnnic boss Cyril Ramaphosa slated *Financial Mail* editor Peter Bruce's backing of the United Democratic Movement (UDM) in the run-up to the June 1999 Elections. Barrell goes on to state that the row over the *Financial Mail's* endorsement the previous week of UDM in the forthcoming election has brought into sharp relief the relationship between editorial independence and media ownership in South Africa.

Ramaphosa alleged that in endorsing the UDM, Peter Bruce was "commandeering" the magazine to push his own personal political views, which were by no means consistent with those of most of his staff or *Financial Mail's* owners. Ramaphosa suggested that the *Financial Mail* should not have endorsed any party in the run-up to the elections on June 2. He stated that the call for a vote for a specific political party seriously compromises the editorial independence and credibility of the *Financial Mail*.

On the other hand an editorial by the editor of the *Business Day*, Jim Jones says that Ramaphosa's attack on the endorsement of the UDM, compromised the editorial independence and integrity of the paper.

Barrell further goes on to quote an undisclosed senior staff member of the *Financial Mail* who said, "there needs to be transformation in the media especially in media ownership. But the effect of the Ramaphosa's article could be to cast doubt on the integrity of the articles appearing in our magazine in future. People may ask: Is that piece in because Cyril Ramaphosa approves of it?"

What becomes apparent is that interference on editorial matters does occur even with the new owners of publications irrespective of the type or size of the publication. The only difference however becomes the size



of the paper, as big established papers have the capability to withstand such pressures.

What crops up in the debate is whether editors of publications themselves should maintain objectivity, as Ramaphosa also argues that Peter Bruce's enthusiastic endorsement tarnishes the record of independence, fairness and unbiased coverage that the *Financial Mail* should stand for.

17. Bhekizulu Mpofu's dissertation entitled **Corporate monopoly in the South African print media**, unpublished, touches on community media as compared to alternative media. Mpofu compares alternative newspapers to community papers in that both made an invaluable contribution by providing society another vehicle of public expression. For instance he writes, people in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape who had been neglected by the corporate media, got a new channel to air their views and concerns. The community papers also helped to localize the medium, focussing directly on the readers' concerns in a way previously untried in South Africa. Mpofu's dissertation also highlights that small community newspapers failed to attract advertisers because they were established to service a poor readership. Also both could not attract and maintain high calibre journalists.

Mpofu in his dissertation also has a chapter on an historical background to the development of South African Press. In the chapter Mpofu articulates that characteristic of small newspapers aimed at a black audience once they came under corporate ownership is that, they could not deal with political issues that could perhaps enhance black popular participation in the public sphere. They only dealt with what they thought Africans, the urbanised Africans in particular were interested in, that is crime, sex, violence as well as symbolisms of Western culture and values which some Africans were aspiring to. The main aim of these papers was to make profit as well as ensuring that the African mind was kept under control. Even black journalists working for these papers were controlled and restrained by the owners, from diverting from the "norm".



Mpofu quotes Tomaselli et al (1987:52) that white-owned publications under the editorship of blacks such as *World* and *City Press* tried to espouse the radical discourse of the period, but soon faced State intervention and became subject to varying degrees of white editorial controls. The content of these papers was decided upon by their editorial directors who exercised allocative and operational controls in these newspaper organisations. The editors and journalists were part of the black professional elite, of doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc. who felt duty bound to campaign for the upliftment of aspirations and expectations of their class and communities. But they felt constrained by their white overseers.

Mpofu concludes by saying that while government as a public body has come up with strategies to ensure that broadcasting in South Africa serves the needs of society as a whole, there is a dire need for public policy that will address the skewed nature of ownership of the public newspaper medium in the country. A democratised South African print media could facilitate free flow of information and participation in public communication by the population as a whole.

18. Communications – 1999 Vol.22 No.2. Murej Mak'Ochieng's article entitled – **The African and Kenyan media as the political public sphere**. In the article Mak'Ochieng argues that African media should seek to redress the imbalance of power in society by broadening access to the public domain in societies where elites have privileged access to it. For it (African media) to be able to fulfill these functions, the African media as a public sphere should be free to a substantial degree, from political and economic constraints and pressures from the state and from organised and vested economic and other interests. He states that some of these pressures can easily be effected when the media are owned by the state, political party or private capital. In the case of other modes of ownership, the media system should be organised so that most interested parties have access to at least some medium of public communication.



Nowhere in the world have more pressures on the media (economic or political) been witnessed than in Africa. South Africa although better off than other African countries, has had its fair share of pressures directed at the media.

19. Professor Guy Berger's 1999 paper – **Towards an analysis of the South African media and transformation** says that media does not and cannot stand outside of the social relations within which it operates. He states that one of the most critical factors for the role of media and democratisation and socio-economic transformation concerns ownership and control. As was graphically evident under apartheid, concentrated ownership works against these roles.
20. Keyan Tomaselli in his article **Ownership and control in the South African print media: black empowerment after apartheid, 1990-1997**, argues that where during apartheid the English press ideologically protected English-dominated capital in general, its new ownership simply demanded profits in the context of global capital. Independent Newspapers, in particular re-routed allocative control from editors to owners through making editors report to management – on both financial and editorial matters. This was something new in South African English press experience and resulted in the resignation of the *Star*'s editor, Richard Steyn.
21. Former President, Nelson Mandela in his address to the **International Federation of Newspaper Publishers Conference** in 1992 says the ANC from its birth has always been devoted to securing the right of the citizens to opinion. He states that in 1912 there existed at least two weekly newspapers in the Xhosa language, published and owned by African companies. In 1913, he states the ANC was able to establish its own newspaper, *Abantu-Batho*. With the exception of *Imvo*, formerly *Imvo Zabantsundu* and *Ilanga lase Natal* everyone of these newspapers has disappeared. Both *Ilanga* and *Imvo* are no longer under African ownership, having been acquired by the powerful media giants that dominate the print media in South Africa.



The false impression he says is sometimes created that the demise of the black-owned created newspapers was purely the outcome of market forces. The hard facts of the matter are that successive white minority governments have since 1910, steadily undermined and destroyed the legal property rights of the disenfranchised majority of South Africans.

22. Meanwhile Deon Basson addressing a workshop on **Corporate Governance** at RAU in November 2001 argues that commercial pressures are not a bad thing per se. He says competition and adjustments is after all what markets are all about. But the reality is that training, quality and investigative approach had never really been a high priority for media companies in South Africa. He concludes that media owners have a huge responsibility to invest in quality journalism.
23. Francois Nel – **Writing for the Media**. Nel (1998:203) refers to the Zambian Editor, Fred M'membe (Rhodes Review, July 1992 p22) when he says, “ financial self-sufficiency is essential for a truly independent press. And that also goes for so called alternative newspapers like Vrye Weekblad, South and UmAfrika which in their early days relied heavily on funding from benevolent financiers, especially the European Economic Community. When someone else is paying the bills there is always a temptation to appease the financiers.”

## **CONCLUSION**

On the basis of the above literature review, it becomes clear that with the changes in government towards democracy in South Africa, the need for diversity in reporting becomes necessary. Diversity in reporting is a process involving marginalized communities that are not attractive to the advertisers. Diversifying reporting requires that funding be sought for the exercise.

Funding, whether it comes from the private sector or public sector comes at a price – editorial independence. Zambian editor, Fred M'membe correctly puts it, “when someone else is paying the bills, there is always a temptation to appease the financiers. Financial self sufficiency is essential for a truly independent press.” (Nel: 1994:203) This poses an ethical dilemma. On the one hand there is a need to diversify reporting to as broad a community as possible. On the other



hand, the funding needed for carrying out that exercise poses threat to editorial independence – another ethical issue.

It can be concluded that both diversity in reporting and funding are required in a democracy, although they are at odds in this situation.

Diversity in reporting is a principle or a rule that should be enshrined in journalism. The fact that it was neglected in the apartheid South Africa was a sin. Journalists, including editors, have a duty to ensure that there is diversity in reporting (deontological approach).

As a result of the history of this country, it would be proper to level the playing field by seeking funding for small community newspapers. In seeking funding, there should be rules that guide that process whilst at the same time protecting the editorial independence of the newspapers. This could actually result in the greatest consequence for the greatest number of people (utilitarian approach). Marginalized communities will be heard and editorial independence will be saved.

## **CHAPTER THREE (3): RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 INTERVIEWS**

**FIRST INTERVIEW** with Mr Victor Tonjeni-Managing Director and Managing Editor of Isigidimi for the Period 1989-1991. READERSHIP 50 000

Victor Tonjeni also Editor in Chief of Inkwenkwezi for the period 1980 to 1984. READERSHIP ± 30 000

### **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

\*Q: What prompted you to start Isigidimi and Inkwenkwezi?

\*A: *After observing for some time that big newspapers in the Border-Transkei region were failing in covering news affecting rural disadvantaged communities, the idea of reviving these newspapers crossed my mind.*

\*Q: Who owned Isigidimi and Inkwenkwezi?

\*A: *Isigidimi was owned by myself (Tonjeni), wife (Layout Artist) and son (Reporter). So in a sense it was a family-owned newspaper. Inkwenkwezi on the other hand belonged to Transkei-Associated Newspapers Ltd, which comprised of Transkei cabinet ministers.*

\*Q: As the managing editor, did you have a final word with regard to story ideas?

\*A: *For both publications story ideas were discussed between staff (reporters) and editors and consensus reached between the two. It was unheard of for the managing editor to impose an idea on the reporter.*

\*Q: Were you at any stage of producing the publication been pressured by either a board member or an advertiser to pursue a story idea or discard one?

\*A: *Advertisers from time to time will come with ideas trying to influence the editorial content. If the advertiser threatens to withdraw advertising if*



*his demands are not met, the editor has to review the situation. For a major advertiser the editor can succumb to pressure but small advertiser's demands are seldom considered.*

*For instance while producing Inkwenkwezi, Transkei cabinet ministers who were also owners interfered with editorial content a lot. They wanted publication of stories that were in favour of the Transkeian government. Those stories reflecting the liberation movement of South Africa had to be discarded. As a result of this, tension started between the editor who was committed to the journalistic imperative and the owners. This then resulted in staff being fired and the closure of the newspaper.*

\*Q: Where did revenue for the newspaper come from?

\*A: *For Isigidimi all revenue came from advertising. All its advertisers were local ones, so there was not much revenue and this resulted in its closure.*

*For Inkwenkwezi owners pumped money from their coffers into the newspaper. Also advertising was good because government departments were also persuaded to advertise in it by owners who were key government officials.*

\*Q: What led to the closure of the publications?

\*A: *Isigidimi would still be serving the Eastern Cape people even today had it not been for lack of finances. Funding that would not interfere in the running of the paper would still give the newspaper second life. Inkwenkwezi collapsed because its owners who had no journalistic interests wanted to control the paper.*

\*Q: Given a shot in the arm by government or business, in the form of funding or subsidy do you think Isigidimi would have survived?

\*A: *Yes, Oh Yes! What small community newspapers need in this country is subsidy to keep them going because they are owned by people from disadvantaged backgrounds. There should be one condition to the subsidy that of non-interference with newspaper content. In this way they will survive without closing or being swallowed by conglomerates. It is*



*also a known factor that their being gobbled up by bigger companies alters their content.*

### **Conclusion:**

Directly and indirectly for both *Inkwenkwezi* and *Isigidimi*, lack of financial resources led to the closure of these newspapers. Also the interview reveals that the editor (Mr Tonjeni) was subjected to pressure from the funders (owners or advertisers) of the newspapers. In other words his ethical considerations were put to test. What also becomes clear from the interview is that Tonjeni operated the newspapers well. According to Tonjeni, there was no bad blood between him and the reporters. The story ideas were discussed without imposition which amounts to good journalism. It was interference from forces outside the newsroom that spoiled the way the newspapers were managed. That is why Transkei cabinet ministers decided to fire all staff including the editor because they saw that they all spoke in one voice.

**SECOND INTERVIEW** with Mr Lungisani Makongolo Editor in Chief of the newly revived *Isigidimi* based in King Williams Town 1999-2001. *Isigidimi* this time started after the closure of *Imvo Zabantsundu* in this town. READERSHIP 38 000. Areas covered included King William's Town, Bisho, Alice, East London (townships & rural villages), Fort Beaufort, Peddie and Middledrift.

### **Questions**

Questions posed to Makongolo were the same as those asked from Tonjeni. They revolved around:

1. The reason for starting the publication – *Isigidimi*
2. Who owned the newspaper?
3. Sources of revenue for the newspaper
4. What led to the closure of the newspaper?
5. Did owners interfere with the editorial content of the newspaper?
6. Given a second chance would the newspaper survive?



## **RESPONSES**

After the closure of *Imvo Zabantsundu* in King Williams Town (one of the oldest newspapers in the country) and the *Kei Mercury* in the process of closing, Makongolo says a vacuum existed in news coverage. Reporters, layout artists and copywriters were still unemployed after being retrenched by *Imvo Zabantsundu*. So, Makongolo says trained staff was readily available and employed in *Isigidimi* on a freelance basis. According to Makongolo, the newspaper depended on advertising for revenue and was owned by staff (reporters and editor).

Even though the advertising rates were lower than those of the *Daily Dispatch* (which also circulates in King William's Town), *Isigidimi* failed to attract advertising to help it sustain itself. Local business preferred to advertise in the *Daily Dispatch* because it had been there for a long time and was credible to them. As a result of these problems it was difficult to pay staff who were all freelancers not full time.

### **Conclusion:**

Advertisers irrespective of the low advertising rates do not believe in advertising in an unstable newspaper. Firstly *Isigidimi* was unstable because it had closed down before and this was a second attempt. Secondly the market *Isigidimi* was servicing was mainly unemployed. Hence advertisers chose the *Daily Dispatch* and *Kei Mercury* because of their target readership and stability. Also the prejudices advertisers have against community newspapers.

Another point is that news covered by *Isigidimi* appealed to a particular audience. With no strong advertising revenue small community newspapers cannot survive.

### 3.2 QUESTIONNAIRE

Sample: Consists of ten (10) respondents:

Respondents Profile:

- 5 retired veteran reporters who freelanced for three or more community newspapers in the Border-Transkei area.
- 2 unemployed reporters who lost their jobs as a result of the closure of the small newspaper they worked for.
- One reporter, one photographer and one layout artist who were absorbed by one of the conglomerates after their newspaper was swallowed by the conglomerate (all come from the Border-Kei area)

### QUESTIONS

1. As staff working for a small newspaper where did your story ideas come from?  
(please tick the appropriate box)  
☐ staff(reporters) ☐ management ☐ both
2. Is working for a small newspaper any different from working for a bigger established one?  
☐ Yes ☐ No (tick appropriate box)
3. In your journalism career did you ever witness the imposition of a story or stories (in a newspaper you worked for) because they favoured either management or an advertiser?  
☐ Yes ☐ No
4. If so, was it for the good of the newspaper?
5. Absorption of a small newspaper by a bigger company – does it benefit the small publication?
6. If so, who benefits?  
☐ staff ☐ management ☐ editorial content ☐ all of the above



7. What purpose do small-scale community newspapers serve in society?
8. Which would be the best tool to use in helping small-scale community sustain themselves?

## **RESPONSES**

### **Question 1**

5 respondents (50%) indicated “both”  
3 respondents (30%) indicated “staff”  
2 respondents (20%) indicated “management”

### **Question 2**

80% (8 respondents) ticked “yes”  
10% (1 respondent) ticked “no”  
10% (1 respondent) did not answer the question

### **Question 3**

80% (8 respondents) said “yes”  
20% (2 respondents) chose “no”

### **Question 4**

Of the eight (8) respondents who chose “yes”, seven (7) approx. 87% stated that the imposition of a story or stories that favoured the imposition of stories. Meanwhile one respondent stated that the imposition of stories should be permitted, as it does not occur frequently. Besides, the respondent indicated that, the advertiser would stay with paper for a long time.

**Question 5**

All respondents (100%) concurred that small newspapers benefit from being absorbed by a bigger company, although they differed on which sector of the newspaper stands to benefit.

**Question 6**

Five (5) respondents (50%) said that all sectors of the paper benefit from the absorption. Three (3) respondents (30%) said staff benefit. While two respondents indicated staff. No respondent indicated that editorial content benefits from the absorption of a small newspaper by a big company.

**Question 7**

A mixed bag of responses was received for this question. The bottom line was that small-scale community newspapers venture where bigger established newspapers do not. They cover stories mainly that big newspapers regard as trivial or unnewsworthy. They (small-scale) religiously serve with distinction the small disadvantaged rural communities in which they exist.

**Question 8**

This question also attracted various responses ranging from unconditional government subsidies to mentoring of small with big newspapers. What was common in the responses was that some form of cash injection was needed for the sustenance of these newspapers. Also the funding had to benefit people who were previously disadvantaged so that they can be owners for the first time.



### Conclusion:

Based on the above questionnaire it is clear that small community newspapers have a major role to play in society, that of covering stories of small communities. The imposition of story ideas seems to be a problem especially with small newspapers because they depend on owners for their survival. Also apparent from the questionnaire is that small-scale newspapers would operate very well if some form of cash injection from an outside source is received. This in a way would prevent interference by owners. Even if owners would threaten to withdraw their monies, the cash injection would guarantee survival of these papers. It should however be noted that these outside sources could engage in the same practices that owners engaged themselves in (interference). That is then where some form of legislation would come in, to safeguard independence. The establishment of a body to protect editorial independence would also help. This body would have to comprise of media people, especially those who were involved in the operation of these small community newspapers.

The absorption of small-scale papers by conglomerates guarantees survival but not editorial independence. Good salaries for staff may be guaranteed but at the price of interference by parent companies.

**INTERVIEW** with Ms Lakela Kaunda – former Chief Editor of the *Evening Post* from 1998-2000. READERSHIP:90 000

### **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

\*Q: Who owned the *Evening Post*?

\*A: *The Evening Post* was owned by Times Media Limited Eastern Cape. What is now known as Johnnic.



\*Q: Who was the EP aimed at?

\*A: *EP was aimed at African and Coloured readership living in the Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage area.*

\*Q: Would you describe the EP as a newspaper aimed at furthering the aspirations of the majority of people of this country?

\*A: *The Evening Post was a platform for debate for the majority of the people of Port Elizabeth. It was structured such that it focused on women's issues, service delivery by government, job creation and other political and economic issues affecting the majority of people.*

\*Q: Ownership of the paper – did it in any way influence editorial content?

\*A: *In any newspaper ownership does not influence editorial content as that depends on the editor. But advertising indirectly does influence content. For example the fact that EP was aimed at African and Coloured people, who most of them are unemployed, scared advertisers away from EP.*

\*Q: What led to the closure of the paper?

\*A: *As I already mentioned advertisers refused to advertise in a newspaper aimed at a market that is not lucrative. As a result EP had a higher readership  $\pm 100\ 000$  but a comparatively low circulation  $\pm 12\ 000$ . This was because about nine people read one copy, as most were unemployed in the area. Secondly TML did not put enough resources on EP but on the Herald because of the lucrative market it was aimed at. In other words the market forces led to the closure of the paper even though it was historically popular among the majority of the people of this country.*

\*Q: Given a financial boost do you think the EP would have survived?

\*A: *Yes it would. That boost would also enable it to expand even to towns like Jeffrey's Bay and Bisho.*

#### Conclusion:

What can be deduced from the interview with Ms Lakela Kaunda is that ownership of a small regional newspaper by a conglomerate, does not necessarily guarantee its survival. There are other factors to be considered such



as whether a paper attracts the revenue it is desired to attract. In other words markets also dictate the survival of a paper.

Secondly a high readership but a low circulation is a dangerous situation. Readership figures should be relative to circulation figures. No matter how sensible the repositioning of a paper is, it still has to attract advertising. With the *Evening Post*, its repositioning strategy seemed reasonable enough to any right-thinking human being but not to the markets.

3.3 **ORAL HISTORY** received from Mr Hlubi Vuso, retired veteran journalist who worked for *Imvo Zabantsundu* for 44 years (1954-1998).

According to Mr Vuso, from time immemorial *Imvo Zabantsundu* was a newspaper aimed furthering the aspirations of the community it operated in. The newspaper was 90% in IsiXhosa, the language of the majority of Eastern Cape people especially the Border area.

It covered a number of issues such as the imprisonment of liberation movement leaders, death of Steve Biko, homeland (Transkei and Ciskei) politics and the transition from apartheid South Africa to the democratic one. He states that during these times its sales rocketed. Its progressive editors such as Daizer Mqaba and Charles Nqakula made sure that the paper maintained its editorial independence. Perskor just enjoyed the financial returns brought about by the massive circulation.

Mr Vuso says the turning point came after Transkei and Ciskei got their independence. Lead stories critical of the homeland policies meant that *Imvo Zabantsundu* could not be circulated either in Transkei or Ciskei. Homeland leaders even made sure that *Imvo Zabantsundu* staff were denied entry in those two homelands. This was a major blow for the newspaper as Transkei and Ciskei were its strong support base. They even countered *Imvo*'s objective reporting by starting their own mouthpieces, *Umthombo* for Ciskei and *Transkei News* for Transkei.

As a result of this, circulation figures for *Imvo Zabantsundu* dropped considerably from the mid 1980s. Also because of this circulation decline, advertisers sought refuge in the *Kei Mercury*, which was widely circulated. This was a setback Perskor did not take well because of its commercial implications.



The end of the homeland system in the 1990s also meant loss of jobs for people living in the Border-Kei area. The closure of homeland factories and redeployment of homeland government officials to other provinces also impacted negatively on the sales of the newspaper (*Imvo Zabantsundu*). The readership dropped a lot, thus resulting in advertisers choosing to advertise elsewhere (*Kei Mercury* and *Daily Dispatch*).

Perskor in 1995 hired a new editor with the hope of reviving the once high circulation of the newspaper, but that also did not attract advertising, in so much that the paper closed down in 1998.

### **Conclusion:**

What can be concluded from the above information is that small-scale community newspapers are extremely difficult to make viable. Despite being owned by a conglomerate (Perskor) and being in existence for a long time, *Imvo Zabantsundu* failed to be economically viable because of a shift in the economy. Also political forces can indirectly impact on the smooth running of an otherwise lucrative newspaper. If the homeland leaders had not interfered with the circulation of *Imvo* in Transkei and Ciskei, the papers would not have closed down.

## **ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA COLLECTED**

Some newspaper owners have their own set political and economic interests in the way they operate their media organisations, which are within the framework of the capitalist system. As Tomaselli (1996:11) has correctly observed, capitalists whether black or white use media organisations to further their own interests and secure and enhance their strategic positions in the socio-economic order. The media as a crucial resource to the democratic process in South Africa therefore, remains still owned and controlled, like before by big capital whose sole interests are profit-driven as well as appeasing dominant political power groups in society. Although after 1994 there were moves to rectify that.

Guy Berger (1999:19) reinforces this point by stating that South Africa's new black and/or worker ownership did not automatically change the nature of media businesses that were bought. He (Berger) cites the example of the *Business Day* newspaper, where black mineworkers became significant co-owners of *Business Day* but that did not mean their voices and perspectives held sway over the paper in terms of content. In fact, the paper remained one of only two dailies with a majority white readership and its contents still pitched towards the interests of that readership.

In the interview with Mr Victor Tonjeni it becomes apparent that both newspapers were at some stage of their existence being pressured by either the advertisers or the owners. Pressure from these forces hits on the editor because the editorial content rests in the editor's hands.

Because of the implications this pressure may have on the paper, the editor finds himself/herself in an ethical dilemma. The dilemma is whether he should uphold journalistic principles or succumb to pressure (owner's and advertiser's) which has commercial repercussions. Being ethically correct (defying economic pressures) may mean an end to the newspaper because the owner or advertiser could decide on withholding their money. On the other hand giving in to pressure is journalistically unethical. So the editor becomes torn between the two, a difficult situation indeed if you consider the size of the newspaper. Big established commercial newspapers have the capacity to withstand such



pressures. But small community newspapers do not. This then places editors of these small newspapers in an even more difficult situation and could result in the death of the newspaper.

For *Isigidimi*, which relied solely on advertising, pressure from advertisers had to be taken seriously. Tonjeni (editor) defied them for the sake of the journalistic content of the newspaper. This resulted in the newspaper losing advertising because advertisers' demands were not met. As a result the newspaper closed down as this was a family owned newspaper and Tonjeni had no financial back up.

Tonjeni's other attempt, *Inkwenkwezi* newspaper failed also because of similar reasons as *Isigidimi*. In the interview with Tonjeni, it becomes clear that the owners of Inkwenkwezi who were politicians had no journalistic imperative at all. Not only did they want to control the newspaper but also they wanted a mouthpiece for the Transkei government in the paper. A move Tonjeni flatly refused. This is evidence of the clash between the two ethical principles. Tonjeni wanted a paper with diverse views and funders wanted editorial control.

The second interview with Mr Lungisani Makongolo on the new *Isigidimi* (1999-2001) shows that he faced the same problems Tonjeni encountered earlier. This was irrespective of the fact that the new *Isigidimi* was operating in the King William's Town area unlike the first attempt, which was in the Umtata area. Makongolo's newspaper failed to attract advertising even though it offered low advertising rates because of the readership it was aimed at (unemployed African people of the Eastern Cape particularly the Border-Kei area). It must be remembered that the Eastern Cape is one of the poorest provinces in South Africa. Advertisers are still prejudiced against small community newspapers.

What can be deduced from the above interviews is the fact that small newspapers do not have the financial capacity to withstand pressures from owners, advertisers and outside funders. This is why some editors who are interested in the survival of their small community newspapers, sacrifice journalistic independence which is ethically unacceptable.



Those (editors) who are committed to journalistic independence of their small newspapers face the music and close down. If Tonjeni could have toed the line and allowed the owners of *Inkwenkwezi* to have their say, his newspaper perhaps could have survived until the end of the homeland system. The same applies with Makongolo and his *Isigidimi*. If his paper would be aimed at a broader affluent employed multiracial readership, the advertisers could have reviewed advertising in the newspaper. But because both editors were committed to upholding objective editorial content both papers closed. Also apparent from the interviews is the fact that small community newspapers cannot be depended on advertising only for their survival. There has to be some form of cash injection so that editors cannot only think about closing or sacrificing their independence. The cash injection whether it comes from private business (as part of their social corporate investment) or government, will have to be accompanied by legislation that protects journalistic independence. Coupled with that, another legislation to ensure that advertisers do not discriminate against small community newspapers should be put in place.

Both the interview with former editor of the *Evening Post*, Ms Lakela Kaunda and the oral history received from Mr H Vuso (*Imvo Zabantsundu*), reveal that at the time of their closure both publications were owned by conglomerates (Perskor for *Imvo* and TML for *Evening Post*).

The *Evening Post* at the time of its closure had for two years started on a new programme of repositioning the paper to be a newspaper for the changing times. This repositioning under the editorship of Lakela Kaunda was good for the readership but proved bad for the advertisers. The newspaper became a platform for debate. It addressed issues of the day such as service delivery by government, women's issues, crime and unemployment, which were key issues for the unemployed African and Coloured readership it was aimed at. This was a move to diversify reporting. This move scared advertisers away. Also the fact that the majority of the readership were unemployed (one copy read by nine people) resulted in a high readership but low circulation figures. TMEC did not take that well and then decided instead to pump more money into the *Herald* which had high circulation figures. What this means is that even conglomerates like Times Media (now Johnnic) are not prepared to finance a publication with



low circulation figures because operating a newspaper is operating a business these days.

The same can be said about the *Imvo Zabantsundu* and Perskor. When circulation figures of *Imvo Zabantsundu* dropped because of the democratisation of this country (demise of the homeland system), Perskor decided to close down the newspaper.

To the conglomerates the number of people (readership) served by a newspaper is not the issue. The point is whether it has profitable returns (circulation). Whether a newspaper had profit potential ten years ago does not matter, it must generate profit now or close down. This puts an ethical strain on the editor again because news has to be packaged such that it attracts more readers.

As Day (1991:182) correctly puts it that news is no longer produced merely as a public service. Newspapers must position themselves journalistically to maximise the profit potential of their news product and this means devising a marketing scheme aimed at attracting a well-educated affluent audience. Within the South African context this is also true. The well-educated affluent readership is the target of the mainstream media. Meanwhile the disadvantaged communities have been left to the small struggling community newspapers that battle for survival. Drastic measures need to be in place to rectify that anomalous trend. The media should be diverse and pay attention to all its people especially those who have been previously left out. We need a representative media that goes beyond class distinctions whilst at the same time it is independent. At face value this may seem unachievable. It places the two ethical principles in conflict. Marketing directors at many newspapers fear large numbers of low-income readers would undermine the appeal of demographics on which high advertising rates are based. Day (1991:183) further states that "it is within this rising tide of commercial expectations that ethical conflicts arise concerning the media practitioners' (editors') obligations to their institutions' own self-interests and their moral duties to the welfare of society".

In the questionnaire, the fact that 50% of the respondents replied that both staff and management contributed to story ideas shows a healthy working



environment. But the 80% response to a follow-up question (question 3) on the imposition of stories favouring owners and advertisers (interference with editorial content) revealed that the imposition happened a lot, especially in small-scale community newspapers. One needs to bear in mind that respondents worked for different newspapers. Only two respondents (20%) denied even witnessing the imposition of stories.

Of the eight (80%) respondents who claimed that imposition of stories takes place, seven (approximately 87%) concurred that such an act amounted to bad journalism. Meanwhile all respondents agreed that small-scale community newspapers benefit from the absorption by conglomerates. They (respondents) also agreed that other sectors of the newspaper like staff and management benefit from the absorption but not the content which they felt does not benefit that much.

Although they put it differently all respondents stated that small community newspapers serve small communities with distinction. They also agreed that big well-established commercial newspapers focus on national issues and rarely cover stories of small communities.

On the last question, various suggestions came up on how these newspapers could be helped to sustain themselves. What was apparent from the responses was that financial injection was necessary for the survival of these newspapers. The funding has to be made available to previously disadvantaged communities. Legislation should stipulate that funders must not interfere with the editorial content.

The overall the research revealed that small-scale community newspapers' content were directly or indirectly interfered with by owners as well as advertisers. That is the reason why some closed down because editors would not budge to the pressure whether political or economic. Also the fact that news has to be packaged to meet business standards, dictates which stories are to be given priority. The person who becomes caught in the moral dilemma is the editor. This trend works against the necessity of diversity in media.



As Day (1991:181) correctly puts it, “editors and news directors are expected to package their news and information to attract a target audience and to exploit the economic potential of the market-place”.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

What South Africa needs is a vibrant independent media, one that entrenches democratic characteristics. The envisaged media should service a wide range of audiences whilst at the same time presenting a wide range of views. An independent media also keeps a watchful eye on government, maintains distance from owners and campaigns for freedom of expression. What should also characterise the envisage media is investment in its own staff by training, developing as well as paying them reasonably and regularly.

Investment whether local or foreign is needed in South Africa especially in the newspaper industry. Legislation should limit the extent of foreign ownership in order to avoid a situation similar to the Independent Newspapers Group where 60% of the company is foreign-owned.

There should also be legislation to assist in unbundling the already concentrated newspaper industry, because it is in print media that concentration of ownership is most visible. Because we need a diversity of ideas, ownership also has to be diverse. In reality South Africa needs a media system which provides for the diverse information needs of the people – particularly those who have been deprived of information. This media system will empower the maximum number of people to publish without fear of being pushed out of the market or being swallowed up by a conglomerate.

Seeing that market forces and changes in media ownership alone cannot achieve transformation, legislation alone cannot diversify the media in South Africa. Thus an independent statutory body responsible for transformation and diversification of the newspaper industry is also required. The body should be funded by the media industry and donors whether local or international. The role of this body would be that of a watchdog and promoter of rights, freedom of expression and access to information as enshrined in the country's constitution. As part of its watchdog role, the statutory body would have to fund targetted media in order to give effect to the rights of the citizens of South Africa. This body should be independent.



In the process of funding targetted media, community media has to be prioritised. Loans should be made available to small commercial media while grants should be made available to community and commercial media. This would be done in order to avoid a situation where big established commercial media want to benefit from the funding.

Funding for the small community media has to come from the following sources, government, donors (international and local) and commercial media. There should be legislation in place to make sure that the stated sources contribute to the fund. In other words contribution to the fund should not be voluntary. Companies as part of their corporate social investment, should fund the media as they do with other social causes.

The recipients of the loans and grants should not be expected to forfeit their independence especially editorial one. Funding alone will not help community media sustain themselves. Equally important will be capacity development, training, social responsibility support and project evaluation and monitoring of community media from time to time. These services will also assist in making recommendations in support of media seeking loan finance.

In transforming and diversifying the media, focus should not only be on changing ownership. The playing field needs to be leveled in the advertising sector as well. For instance the Advertising Standards Authority as a body has to be transformed to be in line with the democratic South Africa. This will involve the representation of all stakeholders in it (egalitarian approach).

### **CONCLUSION:**

Based on the above research and discussion it becomes clear that small-scale regional community newspaper are dwindling with time. Concentration of ownership and the unfairness of markets can be cited as some of reasons responsible for this extinction of small newspapers.

Those small-scale regional community newspapers that have managed to survive have had to toe the line in terms of their editorial content or face closure. The



person in the spotlight is the editor because news has to be packaged such that it achieves its marketing objective and not as a public service. Out of this then arises the ethical question of whether editors are answerable to the public or to the demands of the marketplace.

What disappears with the small-scale regional newspapers is their focus on disadvantaged communities. Their extinction means the media of South Africa is skewed towards the affluent, privileged communities. The vehicle to achieve that is the use of small-scale regional newspapers. As the Kantian approach advocates universal ethical principles, journalists have a duty to promote and ensure diversity in reporting.

It is a known fact that the communities, which are going to be the central focus in diversifying report, the history of this country has been unfair to them. Hence they are unattractive to the advertisers. This then compels journalists to seek funding. Outside funding then results in the violation of journalistic independence. This violation of independence because it was necessitated by funding linked to diversity in reporting, brings about a clash between two ethical principles.

Journalistic independence, just like diversity is an ethical principle. In other words journalists have a duty to ensure that it is always there (deontological approach). In order to resolve the clash between the two ethical principles, a solution benefiting the greatest number of people has to be devised. Both diversity in reporting and journalistic independence are to benefit a great number of people. Legislation that guarantees both diversity in reporting and journalistic independence has to be put in place. This will have the greatest consequence for the greatest number of people. In other words the utilitarian approach to resolving the clash was used.

It can then be concluded that the South African media industry needs to be transformed and diversified. This transformation and diversification cannot be left in the hands of market forces and changes in ownership only.

The democratic government must encourage the development of all three tiers of media namely public, community and private. However, it must seek to correct



the skewed legacy of apartheid where public media were turned into instruments of National Party policy; where community media were repressed; where private media were concentrated in the hands of a few monopolies and where few individuals determine the content of media. As the egalitarian model advocates that individuals should be treated equally in terms of rights and opportunities, new voices at national, regional and local levels and genuine competition rather than a monopoly of ideas, must be encouraged.

Also what is required of the government in a democratic state is to set aside funds for training and development of journalists as well as community-based publications. At the same time government must encourage media institutions to do the same. The complexity of the topic requires the use of principles from different models.

The approach being used to resolve the central question to this Assignment, is one that combines different ethical approaches namely Kantian, utilitarian and egalitarian.

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